

REPORT WRITING

Lesson Plan

NOTES

COURSE TITLE: FIELD NOTE TAKING & REPORT WRITING

BLOCK: 13

DPS ACCREDITATION #:

COURSE LEVEL: 100

INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:

At the completion of the course, each student should possess the following basic competencies:

1. Comprehend the nature of technical writing, as differentiated from other types of writing and how it applies to police writing.
2. Comprehend the ethical imperatives in technical communications.
3. Know and apply the usage and mechanics of standard American English.
4. Comprehend and apply the writing process, particularly in a police context.
5. Comprehend and apply the structure, organization and formats of various brief documents, such as memoranda, letters, investigative reports, and criminal complaints

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of the course, the student should be able to do the following:

Learn to write simple, concise sentences.
Improve grammar
Learn how to organize reports
Include facts and meet legal requirements.
Write a DUI/DWI report.
Examine a domestic violence report.
Complete a narcotics seizure report.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS:	CLASSROOM LECTURE DISCUSSION ROLE PLAY
COURSE DURATION:	8HOURS
CURRICULUM REFERENCES:	Lunsford, Andrea. 1997. <i>The Everyday Writer</i> . New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc. Lannon, John M. 1997. <i>Technical Communication</i> . New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers. Mehlich, Sue. 1997. <i>Technical Writing for Success</i> . Cincinnati: South-Western Educational Publishing. Berry, Dean. 1990. <i>Report Writing</i> . Minneapolis: Law Enforcement Resource Center.
SAFETY CONSIDERATION:	NONE
EQUIPMENT, PERSONNEL AND SUPPLIES NEEDED:	COMPUTER, AUDIO AND VISUAL AIDS; WHITEBOARD
TARGET AUDIENCE:	NEW MEXICO LAW ENFORCEMENT CADETS AND RECRUITS
COURSE PREREQUISITES:	NONE
INSTRUCTOR CERT.:	GENERAL POLICE
INSTRUCTOR RATIO:	1 / 60
EVALUATION STRATEGY:	NEW MEXICO LAW ENFORCEMENT CERTIFICATION EXAM

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REVISION / REVIEW DATE(S):

REVISED / REVIEWED BY:

COURSE OUTLINE:

I. INTRODUCTION

What's a police report?

A written record of facts that identifies the **who, what, where when, how and why** (if possible) of a given incident.

IS THIS YOU?

"The Call"

Time: 1800 hours.

Arrival: 1804.

Address: 4932 Park Street.

Neighbor said: We heard a female yelling and screaming.

Wife: Maryann McCarthy DOB: 4/17/58

Husband: Frank McCarthy DOB: 6/17/55

Son: Timothy DOB: 3/04/93.

Everyday Language

Use short everyday words.

Write short sentences.

Identify people by name, make sure pronoun references are clear.

Eliminate police jargon and "codes".

Winston Churchill:

"Official" vs "Simple"

OFFICIAL:

"I observed Williams throw a plastic baggie out the window".

SIMPLE:

"I saw Williams throw a plastic baggie out the window."

EXERCISE #1

1. Observed: saw, watched heard, smelled, felt.
2. Commenced: began, started.
3. Documented: wrote, taped, photographed.
4. Multitude: many
5. Related: told, said

-
6. Utilized: used
 7. Ascertained: learned, asked, saw, found, found out.
 8. In reference to: about regarding.

EXERCISE #2

1. Smelled
2. About, around
3. Got out, left
4. Because, stopped
5. Called, told
6. Used

Complex vs. Simple

COMPLEX:

“It should be noted that I had seen Jenkins driving the same car two weeks ago.”

SIMPLE:

I saw Jenkins driving the same car two weeks ago.”

Actual Police Report

The residents stated their concerns of the aggressive dog being allowed to stay in the area due to them having small children who play outside and after seeing how the dog became very aggressive toward officers and other persons.

Shorter Sentences

They were worried about the aggressive dog staying in the area.

Their small children play outside.

They saw the dog get aggressive toward the officers and other people.

Rewrite

The residents told me they had concerns about allowing the aggressive dog to stay in the area. They were worried because they have small children who play outside. They were also alarmed by the dog's aggressiveness toward other people and us.

Omit Needless Words

I observed or I noticed.

At this time

Upon further investigation

Subject

That

The welfare of

Omit Needless Words

When omitting words ask yourself:

Does the removal of the word(s) change the facts?

Does the revision present the facts in concise way? (Neat Package)

Does it meet the legal requirements? (Probable Cause or Reasonable Suspicion)

ID People by Names

Use names when available rather than “suspect”, “complainant” and “victim”.

Drop titles like “Mr.” or “Ms.” when possible.

Eliminate Police Jargon and Codes

Avoid vague “boiler plate” language such as:

A hand to hand transaction

Furtive gestures

Frisk for officer safety

REMEMBER: Just say what you saw or why you did what you did.

Writing Tips

Use “I” or “me” to refer to yourself.

Avoid incorrect use of “myself”.

Never use “I seen”, “I been”, “I says” or “I go”.

Write in the past tense.

Use “did” sparingly.

Use the active voice.

Organization

OBJECTIVES:

Organize paragraphs.

Use a forecasting sentence.

Write in chronological order.

Use headings when appropriate.

Paragraphs

Thought organizers.

Forecasting Sentence

Deals with one topic.

Supported by key ideas, facts and details.

Use Headings

Preliminary Information.

Officer’s Observations/Actions.

Victim/Witness/Suspect statements.

Investigation of the scene.

Evidence Collected.

Disposition.

Preliminary Investigation

Tells how you got involved.

Date, time, location (when and where).

Type of incident (who and what).

Source of call, e.g. radio call, citizen’s call, informant, observation, etc. (how).

Officer’s Observations/Actions

Describe what you saw, did, smelled or heard when you arrived on the scene.

Be specific.

Use factual statements.

Victim/Witness/Suspect Statements

Provide an essential link in the continuity of the investigations.

Can be used in guiding the investigation as well as for court evidence.
State what they told you, important statements should be quoted directly using quotation marks.

Investigation of the Scene

Describe conditions of the scene.

Describe any actions taken, e.g. photographs, fingerprints.

Describe circumstances of location of evidence.

Evidence Collected

List all material evidence or seized property.

Document chain of custody.

List documents such as search warrants, affidavits, receipts, photographs, etc.

Disposition

List location of suspect, along with any charges.

If a crime against property, include the recovery of any property.

Identify any follow up activities.

Facts and Details

Use specific language.

Attribute testimony or statements to a person.

Stick to the facts.

Include all the facts.

Don't jump to conclusions.

Important Terms

Reasonable and articulable suspicion.

Probable cause.

Totality of circumstances.

Reasonable and Articulable Suspicion

If something is articulable, it means you can say it or write it in a clear and effective way.

Probable Cause

"A belief based on an officer's reasonable and prudent consideration of the totality of the circumstances that a crime occurred and that the subject to be arrested committed the crime."

Totality of Circumstances

All the information and evidence available, including but not limited to:

Information from dispatchers

Statements of all parties.

Your observations

Physical evidence.

Demeanor and emotional state of parties.

Remember....

If it's not in your report:

IT DIDN'T HAPPEN!!!!

Legal Requirements

Understand the legal definitions of a crime.
 Understand the sequence of an arrest.
 Use a “legal checklist” when writing your report.
 Definitions of a Crime
 New Mexico State Statute Book.
 Provides elements of a crime that must be met.
 Identifies petty misdemeanor/misdemeanor/felony.
 Sequence of Arrest
 4th Amendment.
 Police Actions Under 4th Amendment.
 Logical/Escalating Sequence of Events
 Voluntary contact
 Stop
 Frisk
 Plain Feel
 Consent Search
 Search
 Issue of Citation
 Custodial Arrest
 Search Incident to Arrest.
 Using Legal Checklist
 Jurisdiction
 Legal basis for encounter/stop
 Legal basis for frisks/searches
 PC for arrest.
 Statements obtained.
 Miranda warning/waiver (if applicable)
 Why arrest in lieu of citation.
 Evidence and disposition
 Officers having knowledge of case.
 Defense Attorney’s Viewpoint
 What’s the weak link?
 What can I attack?

Officer

Evidence

Basis for stop

Basis for search

DUI/DWI Report

Establish legal basis.

Clearly describe elements of the offense.

Understand the DUI/DWI format.

Write the report.

Establish legal basis

Sufficient grounds for stopping suspect.

Suspect operator/physical control of vehicle.
 Probable cause to believe suspect impaired.
 Proper regard given to suspects rights.
 Additional observation/interview provided evidence relevant to offense.
 Reasonable grounds for arrest.
 Chemist test properly requested and administered.
 DUI/DWI Video
 View training video.
 Take notes.

Write your report.
 Types of Evidence
 Documentation.
 Testimony.
 Physical.
 Well established facts.
 Demonstrative evidence.
 DUI/DWI Report Headings
 Preliminary information.
 Initial observations.
 Vehicle stop.
 Driver Contact.
 Field Sobriety Tests.
 Arrest.
 Disposition of Vehicle/Occupants.
 Implied Consent.
 Final Disposition.
 Domestic Violence
 Who reads the report.
 Understand the difference between a DV report and others.
 Describe evidence.
 Understand the report format.
 Who reads your Report.
 Law Enforcement Agency.
 Follow up investigators.
 Attorneys.
 Judges.
 Responding officers.
 The Victim.
 Civil Court.
 Probation Officers.
 Advocates.
 News Media.

What's the Difference?

Prepare your case as if it's a homicide and the victim won't be available.

Document emotion state and demeanor of suspect/victim.

Evidence is often subtle/non physical.

Document time of statements.

Accurate information.

Report is important even if no arrest.

Document future risks.

Clearly describe evidence

Was there probable cause.

Did any party act in self defense.

If there is probable cause for dual arrest, who is primary aggressor.

Probable Cause

Does it meet the legal definition of domestic abuse/violence.

Totality of circumstances.

Consider all factors.

Evidence of Self Defense.

Person using force had reasonable belief of receiving bodily harm.

Risk of harm is actual or imminent.

Use of force reasonably necessary to prevent bodily harm.

Use of force based on belief that person has at time of incident.

Offensive vs. defensive.

Elements of the Offense

Observation of the vehicle in motion.

Personal contact with the driver.

Pre-arrest screening.

Report Headings

Preliminary information

Officer's observations

Statements

Investigation of scene

Evidence collected

Children present

Medical treatment

Dangerous suspect assessment

Contact information

Disposition

Tips

Re-read and re-write.

Don't panic.

Have someone else read your reports.

Analyze your weakness.

Read.

Use a checklist.

Conclusion

Your report is a direct reflection of you.

Good reports make for good convictions.